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ABSTRACT

Twenty-one questions parents may ask about kindergarten are answered in this booklet. Generally, the content aims to clarify the purpose and scope of kindergarten. Several questions have to do with entering a child in kindergarten: the required age, necessary information, attendance regulations, length of school day and screening tests. Questions regarding philosophy and content include the following: (1) Why should my child attend kindergarten? (2) What will my child be taught? (3) What is the kindergarten teacher's responsibility concerning reading? (4) What do you do for the child who comes to kindergarten able to read? (5) Will my child learn to write in kindergarten? Other questions have to do with classrooms, materials and teacher aides. Sample parental concerns reflected in the remaining questions include: (1) How will I know my child is getting along at school? (2) Will my child be wasting his time in kindergarten? (3) Why does my child reply "play" when I ask what she did in school? (4) How can I be more involved in my child's education? (5) Should I just stop by to see the teacher? (6) What can parents do to help their children in this program? and (7) Should my child repeat the kindergarten year? (RH)

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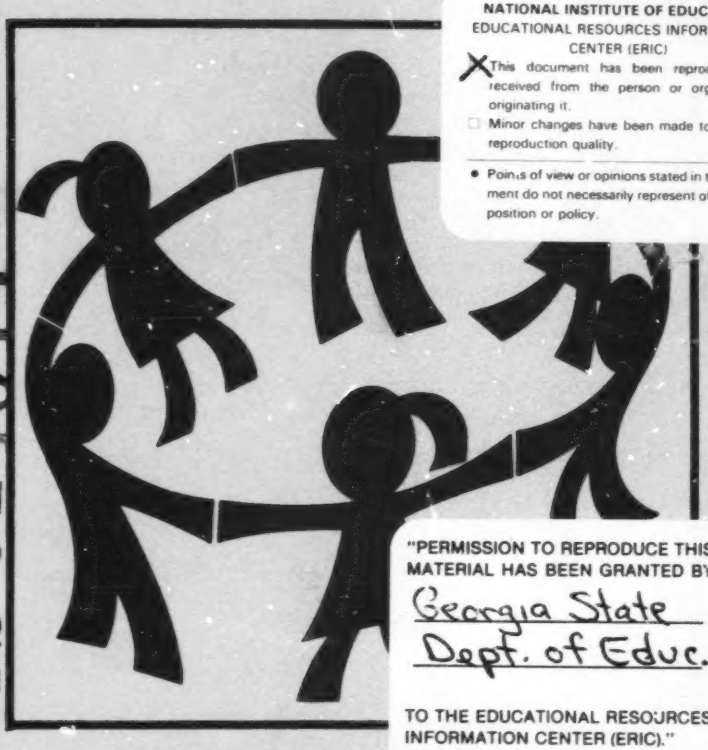

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These responses provide information about kindergarten for parents of young children. They make the purpose and scope of kindergarten clear and answer questions frequently asked about the kindergarten program. Teachers of young children will find this information helpful when discussing kindergarten in their local school system with parents and other interested individuals or groups.

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At what age can my child attend kindergarten?

Georgia provides kindergarten programs for children who are five years old on or before September 1. All five-year-old children are eligible. Early or late entrance may be desirable depending on the child; late entrance is sometimes helpful in increasing self-confidence. State funds are not available for children who are not five years old on or before September 1; therefore, local policies vary on early and late enrollments. Contact the local school system about policies on age requirements for entrance.

What are the entrance requirements?

Parents should be prepared to provide certain records when enrolling a child in kindergarten — verification of the child's birthdate, a record of immunizations and a certificate of examination for eyes, ears and teeth. The verification may be a child's birth certificate or other record acceptable to the local system. Copies of birth certificates may be obtained from tne county in which the child was born. Children must have immunizations for tetanus, whooping cough, polio, rubella, measles, diptheria and mumps. Immunizations and certificates may be obtained through the local health department or the child's doctor. Some school systems provide the eye, ear and dental screening through the local health department after the school year begins, so contact the school.

Must my child attend kindergarten?

Participation in the kindergarten program is voluntary. However, once a child is enrolled, she must comply with the local school system's attendance policies. Children should be encouraged to attend school regularly unless they are ill. Because kindergarten is a valuable experience, many school systems specify kindergarten as the entry level. Check with your local school system.

Why can't my child stay all day?

State funds provide for a half-day (minimum of two-and one-half hours) kindergarten program. Many school systems have elected to use state transportation money and local money to offer a full day of instruction. Contact your local school for information about school hours and arrangements for transportation.

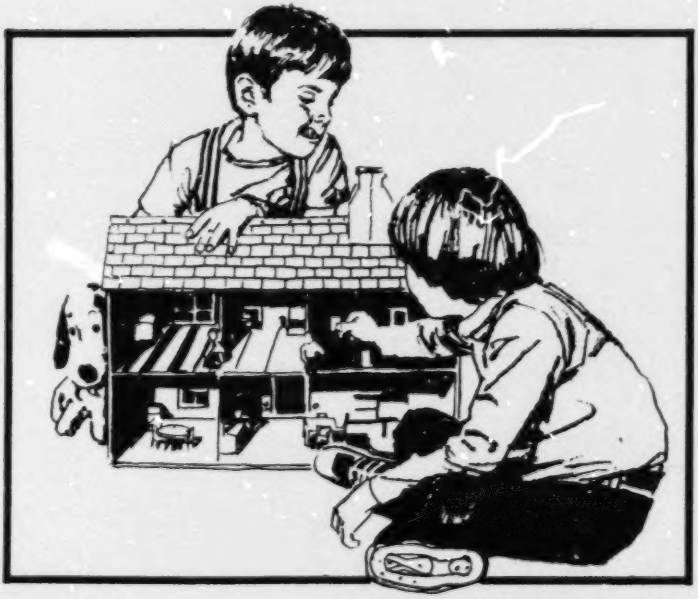
What kinds of information does the school need?

Once enrolled, the school needs to be informed about your child's special medical problems or needs, including allergies if there are any. The school also needs the location and telephone number of where a parent or guardian can be reached in case of an emergency during school hours. Many schools ask for the name and telephone number of a neighbor, relative or friend who could help in case you cannot be located.

Share the insights and understandings you have of your child with teachers. This will help the school provide the program your child needs. "Together we're smarter than any one of us alone" is a slogan pertinent to kindergarten.

Why does the school test my child before he begins kindergarten?

Screening tests are given to students to determine the child's development in motor coordination, vocabulary and language skills. This screening helps the school plan a program which meets the developmental needs of the child. Results of this screening will be shared with parents so that you will have a better understanding of your child's developmental needs and gain ideas for how you can help your child at home.



Why should my child attend kindergarten?

Kindergarten should

develop a child's positive self-concept and attitude toward school and learning.

provide successful school experiences involving active participation to increase interest in school and encourage good attendance.

identify and provide experiences for meeting each child's unique needs.

provide the foundation to increase achievement in school-related learning.

develop the thought processes of measuring, arranging numbers in a series, classifying, etc.

provide activities so the child can move from concrete experiences to understanding the abstract.

improve the communication skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing which enable the child to use language as a tool for learning and self-expression.

provide experiences to further develop the child's physical senses as a method of gathering information.

develop and refine the child's problem-solving and decision-making skills.

stimulate a child's curiosity in her physical and social world.

increase a child's ability to cope with the routines of the school's schedule.

provide satisfying peer group interactions and experiences in independence, cooperation and leadership in a democratic setting.

increase a child's sensitivity to her feelings about self and others.

develop physical coordination and motor skills.

encourage creative self-expression.

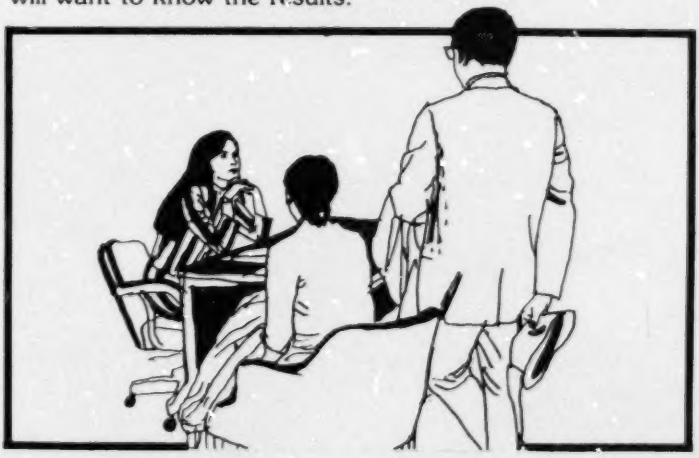
extend parental involvement.

What will my child be taught in kindergarten?

A well-balanced kindergarten program provides experiences which further develop your child's emotional well-being, social skills and physical coordination. It also provides experiences which develop skills in communication, mathematics, creative arts, social studies and science. During registration, at a parent orientation program or at some other point early in the school year, you should receive a description or list of skills and ideas your child will be taught. This list or description will help you to know how to help your child at home.

How will I know my child is getting along at school?

All school systems provide for regular communication with parents either through written progress reports, scheduled parent-teacher conferences or a combination of these or other methods. Ask questions about what is being taught and how your child is progressing. Ask for ways you can help your child at home on specific learning tasks. Another source of information about your child is the results of the tests each school system uses during the school year. Testing varies from school system to school system, but, at a minimum, all schools test progress in language skills and mathematics. Many schools use the Kindergarten Criterion-referenced Test developed by the Georgia Department of Education and evaluate progress during rather than at the end of the school year. Regardless of what tests are used, you will want to know the results.



Why does the kindergarten classroom look different from other classrooms in the school?

Children in a kindergarten classroom work in various small areas of the room for much of the school day. These learning centers allow individual students or small groups of students a place to see, touch, move, name, discuss, hear and sometimes smell and taste a variety of learning materials. When you observe the classroom, you will see children moving about, manipulating objects and visiting with others at certain times during the day. The activities are well-planned by the teacher, who understands that children learn by doing. Only the setting is informal; the small group and individual activities are selected to match the requirements of young learners.

What kinds of materials are used in the kindergarten program?

The kindergarten foundation year is the time to provide your child with a broad basis for present and later development. Kindergarten should not be a time for a formalized reading program, but rather a time to work with a great variety of materials and ideas, to learn to listen, to become fluent with words and ideas and to acquire the basic readiness skills that will make reading meaningful later.

The responsibility for the initial steps of a formalized reading program lies with the first grade teacher. This is not to say the kindergarten program does not provide reading experiences, but these experiences differ depending on the child. Some more abstract reading activities may be appropriate for some children, but these should be used selectively and supplemented with many other related, concrete experiences.

The use of workbooks and ditto sheets is not recommended for any student on a regular basis. Five year olds are physical learners, and they internalize concepts and master skills in many ways other than through paper and pencil. Also, workbooks and ditto sheets imply one set of standards for all children, which is contrary to the philosophy of working with each child on the appropriate level. Experience stories, class books, picture dictionaries and word banks help to stimulate a broad interest in reading and thinking without the pressure to conform and compete.

What is the kindergarten teacher's responsibility concerning reading?

The kindergarten teacher's first responsibility is to conduct diagnostic types of activities to determine where a child is presently functioning. Certain basic skills are required before a child can be successful in reading. Most children of five have not yet developed the thinking processes that rely on the logical, sequential, orderly information presented in formal reading programs. Rather, they are still constructing a whole picture of language. Visual and auditory perception, patterning, sequencing, memory and language fluency are only a few of the critical readiness skills a child must have before he can be a successful reader.

If there are children who master all of the prereading steps and are developmentally ready to move on, a program should be provided to meet their needs. But for the majority of children, a year spent in the fundamentals that underlie the mastery of reading is time well spent.

One Georgia kindergarten teacher maintains, "Teach reading in kindergarten? Yes. Teach reading in *formal reading groups* in kindergarten? No. The year a child spends in kindergarten is an opportunity to orient

himself to the multitude of new experiences associated with going to school. Each child has a chance to explore and savor new ideas and concepts, new routines and new social expectations. Never again will the individual child be able to solve problems and meet new challenges with the creative freedom that is present in kindergarten. Never again will the teacher be able to see so completely the manner in which each child handles problem-solving situations."

What do you do for the child who comes to kindergarten able to read?

Because it is as much a mistake to hold a child back as it is to push a child too far too soon, it should be determined that there are no weak areas in the child's development. The following techniques or activities could be used to determine abilities in listening, speaking, comprehending and decoding words before a more formal program is begun at school. These activities could also be adapted for use at home.

- Let the child draw a picture or choose a favorite picture and record a story about it. The teacher prints this story and the child can read the composition.
- Allow the child to read stories to another child in the corner during free time.
- The child can record story books, with the teacher's help, for the listening station. Be sure to provide practice time for the child and also the audible page turn signal.
- Use a spiral chart tablet to record experience stories. Keep the chart accessible so the child can reread the stories during the year. Stories may also be illustrated.
- Using magazines, the child can make a book of "My Favorite Words" by cutting those words she can read from the magazine and pasting them in the book. The child could illustrate each of the words.

- Let the child compose creative writing stories from sentence completion statements such as, "If I could pretend to be anything or anyone I wanted, I would choose to be. . . ." The teacher prints this story and the child can read and illustrate it.
- Make a TV with illustrations by each child drawn on a roll of paper. The teacher prints the narration for each child and the child who can read presents it to the class.
- During free time provide games which give the child an opportunity to read.

Will my child be wasting his time in kindergarten?

Your child develops in several areas — emotional, social, physical and intellectual. He grows at different rates in each area at various times in life. Because your child has grown more rapidly in the intellectual area than some children, the school must assess the other areas to be certain he does not have needs that have been overshadowed. When the school has determined which skills and concepts have been mastered in each area of development, the school will provide the child with an assortment of experiences to further all the areas of development.

The-five-year old child lives in a three dimensional environment. Interacting with the objects and the people who are part of that world, using all of the senses, enables young children to learn. Kindergarten has a rare opportunity to concentrate on teaching children rather than subject matter. When a child can listen with understanding, use language easily to express ideas, follow directions, be observant, use his mind to reason, respect self and others and express emotions in acceptable ways, school and parents have helped the child build a foundation for life.

Will my child learn to write in kindergarten?

Every child will be given numerous opportunities to develop hand-eye coordination and small muscle control. Also, children will have continuous opportunities to see the teacher writing their names on papers and writing down their thoughts and ideas. As children display a readiness for writing their own name, they will be encouraged to do so. But to expect perfect formation of letters or numerals is beyond the capability of *most* five year olds and discounts the necessary time spent in activities that will help them eventually develop the fine muscle coordination needed for legible, fluent writing.

Why does my child reply "play" when I ask what she did in school?

The kindergarten curriculum is one in which children learn by doing rather than through the formal lessons which will come later in the elementary school years. Play is the work children do. Working with a variety of materials is a time for deep concentration, a time of earnestness and intensity — a thinking time. Recall how earnestly your child explored your pots and pans or a favorite collection of knick-knacks; feeling, fitting, tasting, smelling, poking, scratching — all these actions taught your child about the nature of things in the world around her. In the same way, the clay, paint, crayons, scissors, blocks and games the children use in kindergarten will extend memory, language, thinking and problem-solving skills. Ideas are extended and further organized. Learning should be enjoyed and filled with a sense of accomplishment.

Ask your child to explain what she played with during the day and what she has learned from the experience. Talk about what skills or ideas the class is working on — naming colors, naming shapes or sizes, counting, etc.

Why are there aides in the classroom?

By helping the classroom teacher, aides assure that children receive more individual attention. Their duties vary from helping move children from place to place, for example, to supervising center activities or to instructing students in mathematics. The teacher evaluates and then plans appropriate activities for individuals or small groups of children; the aide helps to carry out these plans under the supervision of the certified teacher. Aides are selected and trained because they care about children. Aides are eager to help your child in any way they are needed.

How can I be more involved in my child's education?

Schools appreciate your interest and your help. Visit the school; you can observe in the classroom, attend school meetings, volunteer to share a special interest or help students in some way in the classroom. Ask questions or read books written for parents. Your school may have a special space in the media center set aside for materials of interest to parents. The media specialist or your child's teacher may be able to recommend some good sources of information. Answers are possible only if you ask questions. Your interest will mean the good beginning to many years of success in education. Your continued interest helps your child's interest and success in school.

Should I just stop by to see the teacher?

Teachers are happy to visit with you about your child and the kindergarten program, but their primary responsibility is to their students during the school day. A note or brief statement of information that is important, such as "Susan's sister has chicken pox," or "Please call me when you have an opportunity" is appreciated and takes little of the teacher's attention away from the children. Teachers appreciate time to prepare for a parent-teacher conference just as you like time to prepare for your activities. If your concerns warrant more than a few minutes of the teacher's time, please schedule a conference ahead of time.

What can parents do to help their children in this program?

- Encourage regular attendance. Of course, when your child is sick he needs to be at home, but otherwise, it is important to take advantage of every school day.
- See that your child gets sufficient rest to be fresh and ready for the day's activities.
- Encourage good nutrition.
- Praise your child's efforts and achievements.

- Take an interest in the things your child brings home from school — talk about them, praise them and display them in your home.
- Read to your child and let her see you reading. Discuss what you read with your child.
- Provide materials and experiences which stimulate your child's curiosity.
- Provide language and experiences which help your child understand the world.
- Ask questions, discuss happenings to help your child think about what he is learning.
- Use clear, correct speech when talking to your child. Baby talk and careless speech hamper a child's ability to learn to read, write and spell.
- Work toward independence by helping your child learn to
  - — hang up coats and sweaters and identify her own belongings.
  - — handle small amounts of money.
  - — manage buttons, zippers, buckles and shoe laces.
  - — take turns in talking and listening.
  - — use simple safety rules, such as not to run inside buildings and to be alert when crossing the street.
  - — use the toilet unassisted and be able to wash and dry his hands.
  - — take turns in games, on the swings and slides.
  - — be careful with sharp objects such as scissors.
- Help your child select worthwhile television programs and books to read.
- Monitor the television programs, books and other materials to which your child is exposed.
- Be a good example.

Should my child repeat the kindergarten year?

Children mature at different rates. Just as young children do not learn to walk or talk at the same time, some five year olds may require extra time to acquire the skills needed for success in formal reading and writing lessons. A good kindergarten can foster and encourage readiness, but it cannot force it. In fact, force or pressure on young children can do a great deal of harm and can impede learning. The best possible program will be provided, but it may be that individual children simply require additional time to grow and mature.

Visit the school and observe your child, then consider carefully the observations and recommendations made by the teacher. Extra time spent in a well-balanced readiness program may mean the difference between successful learning or continual frustration in school. Consider many kinds of information — your observations, teacher observations, progress reports and test scores. The local school system may have established criteria which are used to determine readiness for promotion. You might ask if such a policy exists for kindergarten students and what criteria are used to determine grade placement.

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